

BOOK XXIV.

LUCY AT THE APOSTLES.

I.

Next morning, the recently appropriated room adjoining on the other side of the dining-room, presented a different aspect from that which met the eye of Delly upon first unlocking it with Pierre on the previous evening. Two squares of faded carpeting of different patterns, covered the middle of the floor, leaving, toward the surbase, a wide, blank margin around them. A small glass hung in the pier; beneath that, a little stand, with a foot or two of carpet before it. In one corner was a cot, neatly equipped with bedding. At the outer side of the cot, another strip of carpeting was placed. Lucy's delicate feet should not shiver on the naked floor.

Pierre, Isabel, and Delly were standing in the room; Isabel's eyes were fixed on the cot.

"I think it will be pretty cosy now," said Delly, palely glancing all round, and then adjusting the pillow anew.

"There is no warmth, though," said Isabel. "Pierre, there is no stove in the room. She will be very cold. The pipe--can we not send it this way?"

And she looked more intently at him, than the question seemed to warrant.

"Let the pipe stay where it is, Isabel," said Pierre, answering her own pointed gaze. "The dining-room door can stand open. She never liked sleeping in a heated room. Let all be; it is well. Eh! but there is a grate here, I see. I will buy coals. Yes, yes--that can be easily done; a little fire of a morning--the expense will be nothing. Stay, we will have a little fire here now for a welcome. She shall always have fire."

"Better change the pipe, Pierre," said Isabel, "that will be permanent, and save the coals."

"It shall not be done, Isabel. Doth not that pipe and that warmth go into thy room? Shall I rob my wife, good Delly, even to benefit my most devoted and true-hearted cousin?"

"Oh! I should say not, sir; not at all," said Delly hysterically.

A triumphant fire flashed in Isabel's eye; her full bosom arched out; but she was silent.

"She may be here, now, at any moment, Isabel," said Pierre; "come, we will meet her in the dining-room; that is our reception-place, thou knowest."

So the three went into the dining-room.

II.

They had not been there long, when Pierre, who had been pacing up and down, suddenly paused, as if struck by some laggard thought, which had just occurred to him at the eleventh hour. First he looked toward Delly, as if about to bid her quit the apartment, while he should say something private to Isabel; but as if, on a second thought, holding the contrary of this procedure most advisable, he, without preface, at once addressed Isabel, in his ordinary conversational tone, so that Delly could not but plainly hear him, whether she would or no.

"My dear Isabel, though, as I said to thee before, my cousin, Miss Tartan, that strange, and willful, nun-like girl, is at all hazards, mystically resolved to come and live with us, yet it must be quite impossible that her friends can approve in her such a singular step; a step even more singular, Isabel, than thou, in thy unsophisticatedness, can'st at all imagine. I shall be immensely deceived if they do not, to their very utmost, strive against it. Now what I am going to add may be quite unnecessary, but I can not avoid speaking it, for all that."

Isabel with empty hands sat silent, but intently and expectantly eying him; while behind her chair, Delly was bending her face low over her knitting--which she had seized so soon as Pierre had begun speaking--and

with trembling fingers was nervously twitching the points of her long needles. It was plain that she awaited Pierre's accents with hardly much less eagerness than Isabel. Marking well this expression in Delly, and apparently not displeased with it, Pierre continued; but by no slightest outward tone or look seemed addressing his remarks to any one but Isabel.

"Now what I mean, dear Isabel, is this: if that very probable hostility on the part of Miss Tartan's friends to her fulfilling her strange resolution--if any of that hostility should chance to be manifested under thine eye, then thou certainly wilt know how to account for it; and as certainly wilt draw no inference from it in the minutest conceivable degree involving any thing sinister in me. No, I am sure thou wilt not, my dearest Isabel. For, understand me, regarding this strange mood in my cousin as a thing wholly above my comprehension, and indeed regarding my poor cousin herself as a rapt enthusiast in some wild mystery utterly unknown to me; and unwilling ignorantly to interfere in what almost seems some supernatural thing, I shall not repulse her coming, however violently her friends may seek to stay it. I shall not repulse, as certainly as I have not invited. But a neutral attitude sometimes seems a suspicious one. Now what I mean is this: let all such vague suspicions of me, if any, be confined to Lucy's friends; but let not such absurd misgivings come near my dearest Isabel, to give the least uneasiness. Isabel! tell me; have I not now said enough to make plain what I mean? Or, indeed, is not all I have said wholly unnecessary; seeing that when one feels deeply conscientious, one is

often apt to seem superfluously, and indeed unpleasantly and unbeseemingly scrupulous? Speak, my own Isabel,"--and he stepped nearer to her, reaching forth his arm.

"Thy hand is the caster's ladle, Pierre, which holds me entirely fluid. Into thy forms and slightest moods of thought, thou pourest me; and I there solidify to that form, and take it on, and thenceforth wear it, till once more thou moldest me anew. If what thou tellest me be thy thought, then how can I help its being mine, my Pierre?"

"The gods made thee of a holyday, when all the common world was done, and shaped thee leisurely in elaborate hours, thou paragon!"

So saying, in a burst of admiring love and wonder, Pierre paced the room; while Isabel sat silent, leaning on her hand, and half-veiled with her hair. Delly's nervous stitches became less convulsive. She seemed soothed; some dark and vague conceit seemed driven out of her by something either directly expressed by Pierre, or inferred from his expressions.

III.

"Pierre! Pierre!--Quick! Quick!--They are dragging me back!--oh, quick, dear Pierre!"

"What is that?" swiftly cried Isabel, rising to her feet, and amazedly glancing toward the door leading into the corridor.

But Pierre darted from the room, prohibiting any one from following him.

Half-way down the stairs, a slight, airy, almost unearthly figure was clinging to the balluster; and two young men, one in naval uniform, were vainly seeking to remove the two thin white hands without hurting them. They were Glen Stanly, and Frederic, the elder brother of Lucy.

In a moment, Pierre's hands were among the rest.

"Villain!--Damn thee!" cried Frederic; and letting go the hand of his sister, he struck fiercely at Pierre.

But the blow was intercepted by Pierre.

"Thou hast bewitched, thou damned juggler, the sweetest angel! Defend thyself!"

"Nay, nay," cried Glen, catching the drawn rapier of the frantic brother, and holding him in his powerful grasp; "he is unarmed; this is no time or place to settle our feud with him. Thy sister,--sweet Lucy--let us save her first, and then what thou wilt. Pierre Glendinning--if thou art but the little finger of a man--begone with thee from hence! Thy depravity, thy pollutedness, is that of a

fiend!--Thou canst not desire this thing:--the sweet girl is mad!"

Pierre stepped back a little, and looked palely and haggardly at all three.

"I render no accounts: I am what I am. This sweet girl--this angel whom ye two defile by your touches--she is of age by the law:--she is her own mistress by the law. And now, I swear she shall have her will! Unhand the girl! Let her stand alone. See; she will faint; let her go, I say!"

And again his hands were among them.

Suddenly, as they all, for the one instant vaguely struggled, the pale girl drooped, and fell sideways toward Pierre; and, unprepared for this, the two opposite champions, unconsciously relinquished their hold, tripped, and stumbled against each other, and both fell on the stairs. Snatching Lucy in his arms, Pierre darted from them; gained the door; drove before him Isabel and Delly,--who, affrighted, had been lingering there;--and bursting into the prepared chamber, laid Lucy on her cot; then swiftly turned out of the room, and locked them all three in: and so swiftly--like lightning--was this whole thing done, that not till the lock clicked, did he find Glen and Frederic fiercely fronting him.

"Gentlemen, it is all over. This door is locked. She is in women's hands.--Stand back!"

As the two infuriated young men now caught at him to hurl him aside,

several of the Apostles rapidly entered, having been attracted by the noise.

"Drag them off from me!" cried Pierre. "They are trespassers! drag them off!"

Immediately Glen and Frederic were pinioned by twenty hands; and, in obedience to a sign from Pierre, were dragged out of the room, and dragged down stairs; and given into the custody of a passing officer, as two disorderly youths invading the sanctuary of a private retreat.

In vain they fiercely expostulated; but at last, as if now aware that nothing farther could be done without some previous legal action, they most reluctantly and chafingly declared themselves ready to depart. Accordingly they were let go; but not without a terrible menace of swift retribution directed to Pierre.

IV.

Happy is the dumb man in the hour of passion. He makes no impulsive threats, and therefore seldom falsifies himself in the transition from choler to calm.

Proceeding into the thoroughfare, after leaving the Apostles', it was not very long ere Glen and Frederic concluded between themselves, that



Lucy could not so easily be rescued by threat or force. The pale, inscrutable determinateness, and flinchless intrepidity of Pierre, now began to domineer upon them; for any social unusualness or greatness is sometimes most impressive in the retrospect. What Pierre had said concerning Lucy's being her own mistress in the eye of the law; this now recurred to them. After much tribulation of thought, the more collected Glen proposed, that Frederic's mother should visit the rooms of Pierre; he imagined, that though insensible to their own united intimidations, Lucy might not prove deaf to the maternal prayers. Had Mrs. Tartan been a different woman than she was; had she indeed any disinterested agonies of a generous heart, and not mere match-making mortifications, however poignant; then the hope of Frederic and Glen might have had more likelihood in it. Nevertheless, the experiment was tried, but signally failed.

In the combined presence of her mother, Pierre, Isabel, and Delly; and addressing Pierre and Isabel as Mr. and Mrs. Glendinning; Lucy took the most solemn vows upon herself, to reside with her present host and hostess until they should cast her off. In vain her by turns suppliant, and exasperated mother went down on her knees to her, or seemed almost on the point of smiting her; in vain she painted all the scorn and the loathing; sideways hinted of the handsome and gallant Glen; threatened her that in case she persisted, her entire family would renounce her; and though she should be starving, would not bestow one morsel upon such a recreant, and infinitely worse than dishonorable girl.

To all this, Lucy--now entirely unmenaced in person--replied in the gentlest and most heavenly manner; yet with a collectedness, and steadfastness, from which there was nothing to hope. What she was doing was not of herself; she had been moved to it by all-encompassing influences above, around, and beneath. She felt no pain for her own condition; her only suffering was sympathetic. She looked for no reward; the essence of well-doing was the consciousness of having done well without the least hope of reward. Concerning the loss of worldly wealth and sumptuousness, and all the brocaded applauses of drawing-rooms; these were no loss to her, for they had always been valueless. Nothing was she now renouncing; but in acting upon her present inspiration she was inheriting every thing. Indifferent to scorn, she craved no pity. As to the question of her sanity, that matter she referred to the verdict of angels, and not to the sordid opinions of man. If any one protested that she was defying the sacred counsels of her mother, she had nothing to answer but this: that her mother possessed all her daughterly deference, but her unconditional obedience was elsewhere due. Let all hope of moving her be immediately, and once for all, abandoned. One only thing could move her; and that would only move her, to make her forever immovable;--that thing was death.

Such wonderful strength in such wonderful sweetness; such inflexibility in one so fragile, would have been matter for marvel to any observer. But to her mother it was very much more; for, like many other superficial observers, forming her previous opinion of Lucy upon the slightness of her person, and the dulcetness of her temper, Mrs. Tartan

had always imagined that her daughter was quite incapable of any such daring act. As if sterling heavenliness were incompatible with heroicness. These two are never found apart. Nor, though Pierre knew more of Lucy than any one else, did this most singular behavior in her fail to amaze him. Seldom even had the mystery of Isabel fascinated him more, with a fascination partaking of the terrible. The mere bodily aspect of Lucy, as changed by her more recent life, filled him with the most powerful and novel emotions. That unsullied complexion of bloom was now entirely gone, without being any way replaced by sallowness, as is usual in similar instances. And as if her body indeed were the temple of God, and marble indeed were the only fit material for so holy a shrine, a brilliant, supernatural whiteness now gleamed in her cheek. Her head sat on her shoulders as a chiseled statue's head; and the soft, firm light in her eye seemed as much a prodigy, as though a chiseled statue should give token of vision and intelligence.

Isabel also was most strangely moved by this sweet unearthliness in the aspect of Lucy. But it did not so much persuade her by any common appeals to her heart, as irrespectively commend her by the very signet of heaven. In the deference with which she ministered to Lucy's little occasional wants, there was more of blank spontaneousness than compassionate voluntariness. And when it so chanced, that--owing perhaps to some momentary jarring of the distant and lonely guitar--as Lucy was so mildly speaking in the presence of her mother, a sudden, just audible, submissively answering musical, stringed tone, came through the open door from the adjoining chamber; then Isabel, as if seized by some

spiritual awe, fell on her knees before Lucy, and made a rapid gesture of homage; yet still, somehow, as it were, without evidence of voluntary will.

Finding all her most ardent efforts ineffectual, Mrs. Tartan now distressedly motioned to Pierre and Isabel to quit the chamber, that she might urge her entreaties and menaces in private. But Lucy gently waved them to stay; and then turned to her mother. Henceforth she had no secrets but those which would also be secrets in heaven. Whatever was publicly known in heaven, should be publicly known on earth. There was no slightest secret between her and her mother.

Wholly confounded by this inscrutableness of her so alienated and infatuated daughter, Mrs. Tartan turned inflamedly upon Pierre, and bade him follow her forth. But again Lucy said nay, there were no secrets between her mother and Pierre. She would anticipate every thing there. Calling for pen and paper, and a book to hold on her knee and write, she traced the following lines, and reached them to her mother:

"I am Lucy Tartan. I have come to dwell during their pleasure with Mr. and Mrs. Pierre Glendinning, of my own unsolicited free-will. If they desire it, I shall go; but no other power shall remove me, except by violence; and against any violence I have the ordinary appeal to the law."

"Read this, madam," said Mrs. Tartan, tremblingly handing it to Isabel,

and eying her with a passionate and disdainful significance.

"I have read it," said Isabel, quietly, after a glance, and handing it to Pierre, as if by that act to show, that she had no separate decision in the matter.

"And do you, sir, too, indirectly connive?" said Mrs. Tartan to Pierre, when he had read it.

"I render no accounts, madam. This seems to be the written and final calm will of your daughter. As such, you had best respect it, and depart."

Mrs. Tartan glanced despairingly and incensedly about her; then fixing her eyes on her daughter, spoke.

"Girl! here where I stand, I forever cast thee off. Never more shalt thou be vexed by my maternal entreaties. I shall instruct thy brothers to disown thee; I shall instruct Glen Stanly to banish thy worthless image from his heart, if banished thence it be not already by thine own incredible folly and depravity. For thee, Mr. Monster! the judgment of God will overtake thee for this. And for thee, madam, I have no words for the woman who will connivingly permit her own husband's paramour to dwell beneath her roof. For thee, frail one," (to Delly), "thou needest no amplification.--A nest of vileness! And now, surely, whom God himself hath abandoned forever, a mother may quit, never more to revisit."

This parting maternal malediction seemed to work no visibly corresponding effect upon Lucy; already she was so marble-white, that fear could no more blanch her, if indeed fear was then at all within her heart. For as the highest, and purest, and thinnest ether remains unvexed by all the tumults of the inferior air; so that transparent ether of her cheek, that clear mild azure of her eye, showed no sign of passion, as her terrestrial mother stormed below. Helpings she had from unstirring arms; glimpses she caught of aid invisible; sustained she was by those high powers of immortal Love, that once siding with the weakest reed which the utmost tempest tosses; then that utmost tempest shall be broken down before the irresistible resistings of that weakest reed.